**The Nation’s Report Card**

Test scores on a national exam show U.S. students improved in math but not reading this year

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Standardized tests are used to measure student achievement in subject areas.

Scores on a national test released on November 1 show that U.S. students have improved in math over the last two years, but mostly stayed the same in reading. The test is the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). It is the largest measure of student achievement in the U.S.

The NAEP is given every two years to measure student achievement in math and reading. This year, 422,000 fourth graders and 343,000 eighth graders took the exams between January and March. Students were asked to read grade-appropriate materials and answer questions for the reading test. For the math test, students answered questions about geometry, algebra, number properties, measurement and other topics.

**Some Progress**

The U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Educational Statistics released the scores in a report called The Nation’s Report Card. This year, students earned the highest scores ever recorded on the math exam, which has been given since 1990. Fourth graders scored an average of 241, on a 0-500 point scale. That is a one-point increase from 2009 and a 28-point increase from 1990. Eighth graders made similar progress. Their average score this year was 284, up one point from 2009 and 21 points from 1990.

Reading scores have not improved much. Fourth graders scored an average of 221 points, the same average score since 2007. That score is four points above those from 1992, when the first reading test was given. Eighth graders scored an average of 265 points, up one point from 2009 and five points from 1992.

Officials are concerned that too few U.S. students are becoming proficient in math and reading. "The modest increases in NAEP scores are a reason for concern as much as optimism,” Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said in a statement. He runs the Education Department. “It's clear that achievement is not accelerating fast enough for our nation's children to compete."

**How Kids Learn**

Education experts say reading is a harder subject to tackle in the classroom than math. While math is largely learned in classrooms, reading results depend on how much kids read outside of school and how much they read in other subjects, such as history and science.

On the NAEP, math scores were highest among students who have limited use of a calculator during math lessons, compared to students who have unlimited use or no use. Reading scores were highest among students who said they read for fun on their own time almost every day.